

The Seafish Guide To **The Responsible Fishing Scheme**



This guide outlines the re-developed Responsible Fishing Scheme (RFS) describing what has changed, how it will be managed and how it will benefit the whole supply chain.

A Definition

The Seafish Responsible Fishing Scheme (RFS) is a voluntary vessel-based programme certifying high standards of crew welfare and responsible catching practices on fishing vessels. The independently audited scheme demonstrates that a vessel and its skipper is operating to best practice in five core areas:

- **safety, health and welfare of the crew**
- **training and professional development**
- **the vessel and its mission**
- **care of the catch**
- **care for the environment**

Established in 2006, the scheme is open to all types of fishing vessels and fisheries – from pelagic trawlers in the north east of Scotland to specialist sardine netters in Cornwall. The RFS standards have been fully revised and, from re-launch during 2015, will now include social responsibility requirements. Such assurance is increasingly being sought by the supply chain thus, RFS satisfies a unique and necessary function, complementing other fishery-based sustainability certifications and contributing to this sector's long term viability.

The RFS provides tangible evidence that the seafood landed by a vessel has been responsibly harvested and handled to industry agreed standards from catch to quayside.

Therefore, the RFS is a positive tool for any vessel in promoting itself and its products to the market.

The 2015 re-launch of the scheme will also feature the addition of a Chain of Custody standard, with major UK supermarkets and foodservice sector suppliers having made commitments to feature the RFS scheme within both their UK and International sourcing policies.

The Responsible Fishing Scheme promotes a responsible fishing industry assuring good practice from sea to quayside, contributing to its long-term viability.

Defining 'Responsible' Fishing

In seafood the term 'responsible sourcing' usually refers to responsible fishing – in other words fishing responsibly for wild-caught fish. Since there are many types of fisheries and many fish species the range of factors influencing what is 'responsible' practice can vary greatly. However it is generally accepted that the [FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries](#) is the 'handbook' for defining 'responsible' fishing behaviours.

The Sustainable Seafood Coalition (SSC) is the first ever cross-industry group in the UK to tackle seafood sustainability challenges. Their voluntary codes of conduct outline general good practice in [Environmentally Responsible Fish and Seafood sourcing](#).

Fishermen understand that they are an integral part of the process of stewardship of marine resources; that they have to both act responsibly and be able to demonstrate that responsibility. The RFS provides an important validation for this behaviour.

The new vessel standards, now including crew welfare criteria, and the addition of a Chain of Custody standard will enable RFS members to promote responsible and ethical behaviour on fishing vessels supplying the UK market.



Complying with the Specification

Each vessel will be expected to meet the requirements of the Crewed or Single Handed RFS Standards, as described within the suite of RFS Compliance Support Guides and generic support documentation.

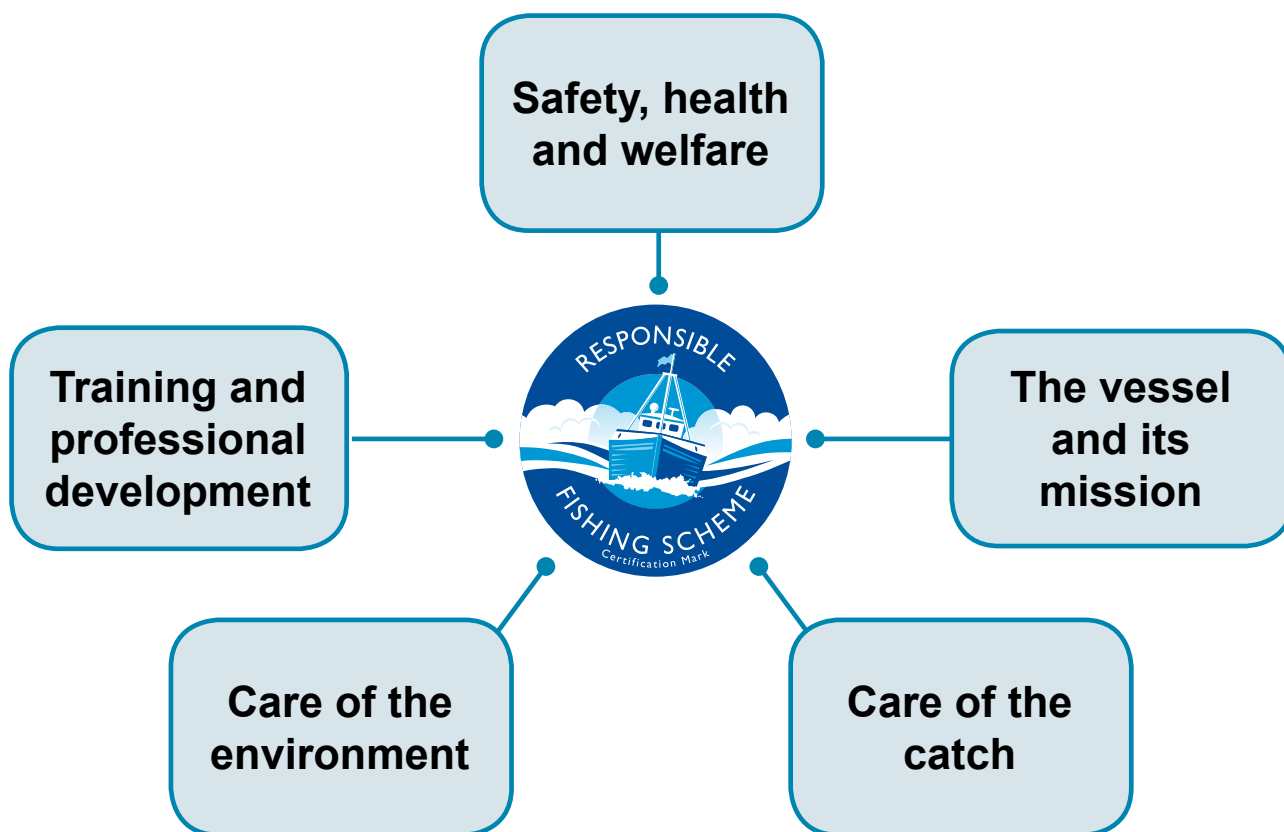
Each Standard introduces five core principles and the associated assessment programme considers both the vessel and the skipper's compliance to them. Compliance Support Guides underpin each standard and assist the skipper in understanding all areas that will need to be complied with to successfully achieve RFS certification.

Safety, health and welfare

Welfare is a paramount concern and is core to the RFS. A commitment to generating a culture of integrity and respect (e.g. no forced labour) will be demonstrated. Requirements established also draw from other relevant safety management and ethical and welfare initiatives to improve safety of the crew and promote decent working conditions.

Training and professional development

This covers accessible training for the key priority areas, especially safety. Focus is on improving skills, knowledge and understanding. There is also a commitment to raise standards, open up new opportunities and cooperate with management authorities so that RFS becomes a channel of influence.





The vessel and its mission

Dealing with the legality of operations ensuring that the vessel and its gear are in compliance with current legislation and all the right documentation is in place. Requirements also ensure there is full cooperation with any Voluntary Agreements in place within the fishery.

Care of the catch

With a focus on supplying safe, high quality, wholesome products with known provenance, requirements include hygienic handling and storage at appropriate temperatures with full traceability from catch to quayside. Also ensures responsible capture and landing of live products and a commitment to maintaining the value of the catch.

Care for the environment

Behaving responsibly and respecting the environment is the focus including management of litter, lost fishing gear recovery, wildlife interaction records and supporting fishery science. Tie in with other voluntary schemes has also been incorporated.

Key Facts

The Seafish Responsible Fishing Scheme was originally launched in May 2006

with over

1,100

vessels registered on the scheme since its first iteration.

How the Audit Process Works

The assessment of a vessel applicant will follow a clear certification process fully in compliance with ISO17065 accreditation requirements, ensuring that it is impartial, credible and transparent.

Skippers interested in RFS will contact Seafish for an Application Pack which gives a comprehensive overview of what certification will entail. Once the skipper has worked through the relevant Compliance Support Guides and generic support documentation to ensure all necessary policies are in place, they will submit their documents to the RFS certification body – Food Certification International (FCI).

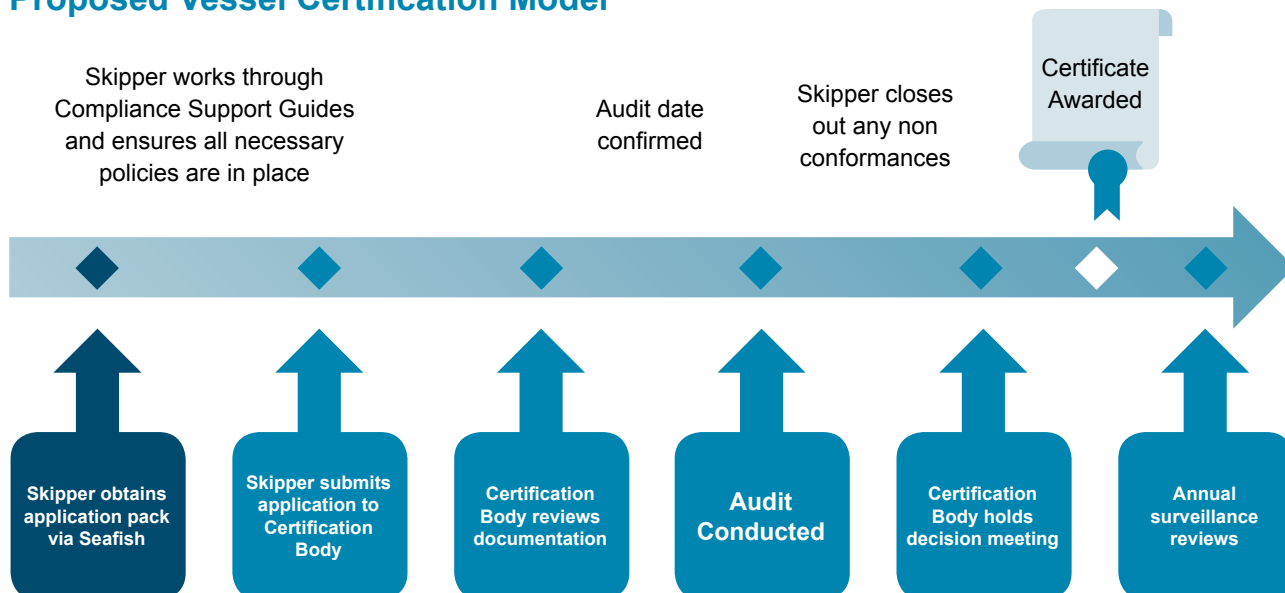
Once FCI are confident everything is in order a vessel audit will be performed and the findings reported back to the skipper, with 30 days given to resolve any non-conformances. The final decision is then made by FCI's Certification Committee, who are independent from the audit team and award certification to the successful applicants. The unit of certification is both the vessel and the skipper as a partnership.

The audit cycles proposed would see 'vessel-based' audits in years one and three with a desk top audit for year two, though frequency of vessel-based audits will be subject to the vessels demonstrating compliance with the RFS requirements for a responsible catching practice.

As the unit of certification is the vessel and the skipper, if the partnership changes then certification will be suspended until the RFS certification body have audited the new partnership in place. This could be either a desk top or vessel-based audit depending on the circumstances.



Proposed Vessel Certification Model



RFS Governance

The RFS programme has a robust Governance structure designed to ensure that all sectors have ample input into the programme’s development process, and that the content of the new standards created are fit for purpose and meets the key objectives of the programme.

Agreeing the strategic direction and objectives of the RFS programme has been delegated to the RFS Oversight Board from the main Seafish Board. This Oversight Board is composed of representatives taken from all sectors of the supply chain and includes a number of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

Each member of the Oversight Board was chosen initially by Seafish on their personal and corporate credentials. Full lists of members of the RFS board, committee and technical working groups can be found on the Seafish website.

The RFS Technical Committee support the Oversight Board in the development of the

Standards. The Technical Committee represent supply chain, catching sector and other key interested parties including; fishermen, fishermen’s federations, fish processors, Maritime & Coastguard Agency, retailers, and marine environmental, ethical and legal NGOs.

Technical Working Groups support the process with input into the standards and content for the Compliance Support Guides, helping to ensure the expectations set reflect industry accepted practices.

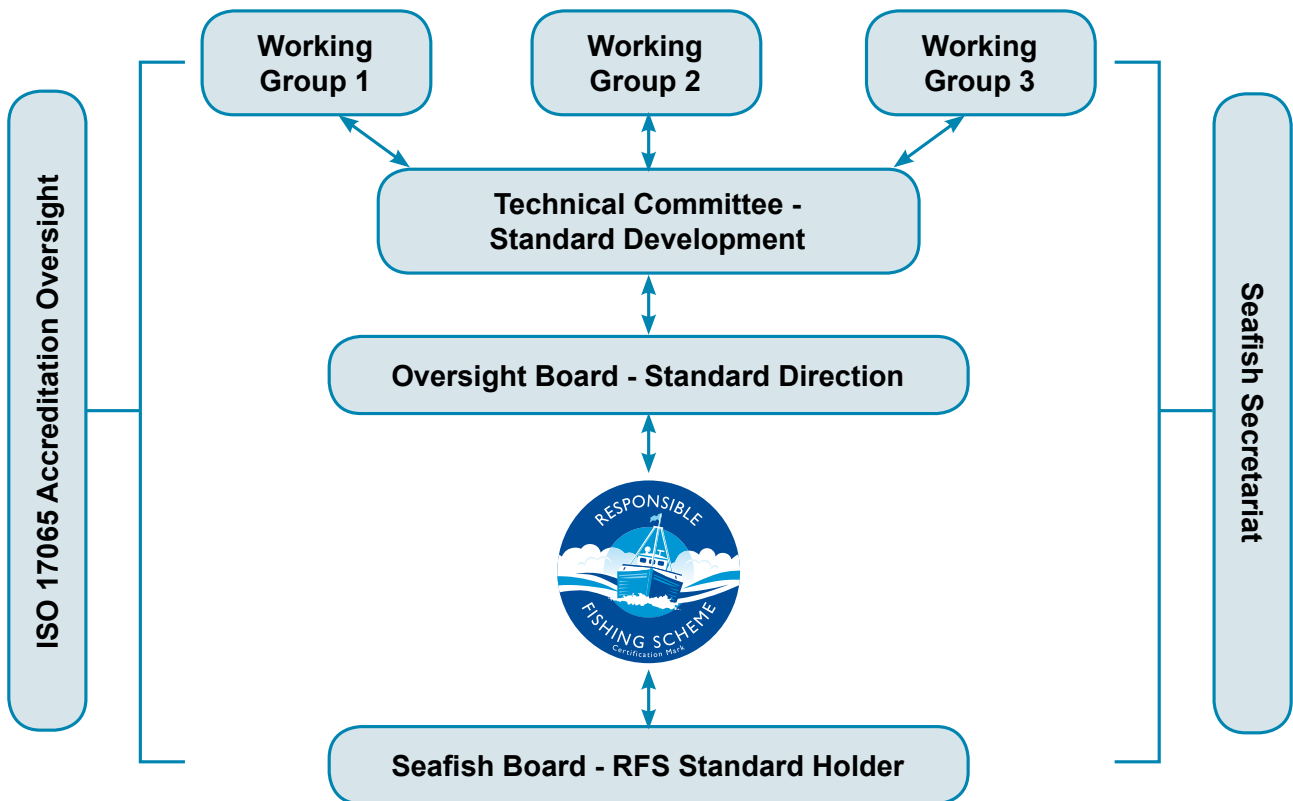
The Responsible Fishing Scheme remains vessel focussed and will be actively promoted throughout the industry and supply chain.

The RFS is the **ONLY**
 global standard for vessels certifying
 responsible catching practices and
 crew welfare.



The approach taken enables the scheme to become a fully ISO 17065 Accredited Programme. This establishes the potential for RFS to be used as a due diligence tool internationally, so furthering international cooperation and trade, and contributing to the seafood industry’s long-term viability.

The new RFS will be independently audited against the international accreditation criteria of ISO17065 providing a transparent, robust and credible endorsement of seafood sourced from RFS vessels.



The RFS will provide the UK supply chain with a transparent and ethical chain of custody for their seafood sourcing policies.



Benefits for All

The RFS helps to ensure that a quality product reaches the consumer – it benefits the whole supply chain:

For Fishermen

As a fisher, RFS certification makes you a supplier of choice. It shows the industry your commitment to best practice, from the quality and safety of a catch to ethical crew welfare.

For Fish Processors

As a processor, sourcing seafood from RFS certified vessels not only provides you with quality assurance, but reinforces your role in raising standards industry wide.

For Retailers

Retailers want quality produce - but also want confidence that the produce they sell to consumers has been sourced responsibly. RFS can provide this assurance.

For Foodservice and Restaurants

When it comes to eating out, responsibly sourced produce can be an intrinsic part of the way that a restaurant or takeaway demonstrates its high standards.

Key RFS Contacts

To find out more about the RFS please get in touch with:

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About Seafish

Seafish was founded in 1981 by an Act of Parliament and aims to support all sectors of the seafood industry for a sustainable, profitable future. It is the only pan-industry body offering services to all parts of the industry, from the start of the supply chain at catching and aquaculture; through processing, importers, exporters and distributors of seafood right through to restaurants and retailers.

For further information please refer to our website:

www.seafish.org

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